

13 July 1983

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Sandinista Treatment of Jews

1. Nicaragua's small Jewish community was persecuted after the triumph of the Sandinista revolution, but probably not because of its religion. US Embassy officials, who have discussed the issue with numerous contacts across the political spectrum, report that most believe Jews were not singled out for special retribution because of their religion. While the Embassy is currently attempting to generate more specific information by meeting with some of the few remaining Jewish residents, our preliminary conclusion is that the Jews were primarily victims of Sandinista efforts to weaken the private sector and punish those who supported Somoza. [redacted]

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2. The Sandinistas' close ties to the PLO during the revolution and resentment of Israeli arms support to Somoza also probably contributed to suspicion of the Jewish community by Sandinista leaders. They do not, however, necessarily imply anti-Semitism. The Sandinistas continued nominal diplomatic ties with Israel until August 1982, when they were broken to protest the invasion of Lebanon. Sandinista propaganda has been virulently anti-Israeli since then, but only in rare instances can there be found statements in the government controlled press which can be characterized as anti-Semitic. [redacted]

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3. The Sandinistas admit to wide ranging confiscations, although they maintain that many Jews had fled the country before they took power, leading to the forfeiture of their property. Subsequently, a few other Jews lost their properties under decrees that prohibited abandonment or decapitalization. A recent press article quotes Jewish exiles as denying having business links to Somoza, but some of them did have these ties and were penalized for them. [redacted]

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4. The Sandinista sponsored human rights commission maintains that the synagogue was abandoned as the Jewish population declined during the civil war. In mid-July 1979, [redacted]

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several homeless families began to use the building for shelter, and it currently is a youth center. The government has justified confiscation of the synagogue on narrow legal grounds, claiming it was not legally registered as a house of worship. The synagogue was included when the property of Abraham Gorn--president of the Jewish community--was seized for decapitalization in September 1980. [REDACTED]

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5. The Sandinistas have stated that Jews are free to come to Nicaragua and have no cause to fear persecution. Nevertheless, the Nicaraguan government is unlikely to go out of its way to welcome back Jewish exiles. While the government's human rights commission has extended its good offices if a group of Jews were interested in finding a location for a new synagogue, Sandinista officials have resisted talks with Jewish exiles, and we believe that the regime would not return most of their property. [REDACTED]

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